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SUPPLEMENT

Man's Attitude Towards His Physical Life

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I ASSURE you that I am not using a merely conventional phrase when I say that I am very greatly honoured by your invitation to address this Association, for it is a very real honour to be even momentarily associated with a body of men who are making so great and so indispensable a contribution to the safety and happiness of human life.

The best type of insurance officer, as I see him, is in his head a combination of the business man, the economist, and the scientist. But in his heart he is a humanitarian, sensitive to the physical and spiritual problems of human life, and eager to direct the great powers of insurance toward their solution. He may seem at times to be a walking statistical report, full of figures, mathematical calculations, actuarial records, and financial tables. I am very glad that he is, for it is because he has founded his business on scientific methods and accurate measurements that he stands today the world's safest custodian of other people's money, and the best protector of the economic safety of millions of his fellow-men.

These are not mere compliments. You did not ask me to make a long journey for the purpose of paying you compliments.

You asked me to come because your profession and mine have something in common—we are both interested in the physical problems of mankind, and you wanted to hear what the student of human biology has to say about some of them.

My theme is "Man's Attitude Towards His Physical Life" and my remarks will center ultimately on that word *attitude*.

I shall divide what I have to say under five headings:—

(1) Some Biological and Economic Aspects of Disease
(2) Balancing the Books of the Health Account
(3) Education and Health
(4) Health and the Ideal of Democracy

(5) Attitude as the Deciding Factor

Please don't be apprehensive about that formidable array of sub-headings; I shall deal with each as briefly and concisely as possible.

SOME BIOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF DISEASE

Disease is not a recent evolutionary product, as some unscientific folk would have us believe. There is evidence that it has been co-existent with the entire history of life on this planet. There are many causes of disease that have not yet been discovered, but the achievements of biological investigation enable us to deny that any cause is undiscoverable. We hope, in time, to know every cause. Today we are at least able to state one sound generalization: disease is the result of some violation of natural law—the organism has failed to make the responses demanded of it by Nature.

Somewhere there has been weakness, unadaptiveness, or disobedience, sometimes in the individual and sometimes in the faulty generations preceding it. Not only individuals die; whole races are doomed, and the place thereof shall know them no more.

This measuring out of the penalties of sickness and death is inexorable. It was Nature who first established the decree that "Ignorance of law is no excuse," and under her stern code ignorance and weakness and disobedience are unforgivable.

These laws operate blindly and automatically in the case of the lower animals.

But there arose a thinking animal called Man, and because he watched and pondered and slowly thought his way through a maze of cause-and-effect problems, he gradually came to be in increasing degree the master of the forces of Nature. He harnessed them to do his bidding, to serve his comfort and safety.

But in the pride of his accomplishments, he is today in deadly danger of forgetting that he is still their servant; he may direct those forces toward good or evil ends, but he is still, and always will be, answerable to the laws which govern those forces, and he can use them safely only as long as his own obedience is the quid pro quo for his own achievements.

Our responses to those laws are no longer the automatic tropisms of the lower animals; there has been given to us the differentiating power of free-will. We are not behavioristic puppets, jerked helplessly hither and thither on the strings of natural forces. We are children of God, armed with powers of mind and spirit, endowed with the high privilege and charged with the solemn responsibility of choosing our own deeds and destinies. We have eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and of evil; we have been taught by our pains, punished but educated by our mistakes, and today we stand looking—some hopefully, some fearfully—toward the future of human life.

We need waste no time in speculating as to that future. One thing alone is clear—that the future of our physical life will be just what we determine to make it, and that determination must be the only motive power that can enable science to improve the quality of human life.

In other words, it is our attitude, not our knowledge, that will write success or failure, ascent or descent, on the tablets of our destiny.

What is our present attitude? Let the economic aspects of disease give us the answer: despite all our boasted accomplishments in preventive medicine and public health, and despite all the power which science offers toward the conquest of disease, we are still witnessing the tragic world-spectacle of millions of preventable deaths, tens of millions of cases of avoidable sickness, hundreds of millions of the physically defective, and billions of dollars of resultant economic wastage.

From 50 to 70 per cent of this is preventable in the light of our present knowledge, yet we continue to pay out the following sums of money*:

In recent years, physical impairment has cost the people of the United States the sum of $75,000,000,000. In Canada the same condition obtains in relative proportions. At any given time 70,000 of the Canadian working population are absent from work owing to illness.

Every year the Dominion of Canada has to spend on the maintenance of her hospitals, sanatoria, and asylums alone, and not counting other medical costs, a sum exceeding $50,000,000. The annual cost of preventable disease and preventable premature death in the United States comes to $8,250,000,000. In Canada our cost of the same items comes to $1,300,000,000, of which $300,000,000 is due to preventable disease. Remembering that 50 to 70 per cent of this loss is definitely avoidable, Canada could therefore save in any one year at least $150,000,000 and possibly $210,000,000, which, as Professor Cassidy points out, is a sum far in excess of our present national deficit.

Millions of dollars, flung away. And some ironic nomenclator named us Homo sapiens! We haven't as much sense as the village idiot who went around hitting himself on the head with a hammer because it felt so good when he stopped!

We haven't stopped yet.

From an economic standpoint then, we are paying out as the price and penalty of our indifference, our lack of determination to make use of our laboriously acquired knowledge, enormous sums of money that could be devoted to constructive work for humanity instead of paying for the destruction wrought by preventable disease.

I repeat, it isn't primarily a question of knowledge and further research. The question is: how are you going to develop a new attitude that will cause people to accept and put into practice what we already know?

BALANCING THE BOOKS OF THE HEALTH ACCOUNT

Insurance men have such comprehensive and accurate information on this point that I would not mention it if it were not necessary for the continuity of my argument.

Briefly, we have made great and encouraging progress in the reduction of the communicable diseases, and at the same time we have witnessed a

**For these figures I am indebted to such authorities as Dr. Louis Dublin, the foremost life insurance statistician in the United States and recently President of the American Public Health Association; Dr. Stuart Chase; Dr. J. S. McCullough, Department of Health, Ontario, and most particularly to a reeent article by Dr. J. M. Cassidy of the University of Toronto.*

steady and discouraging increase in those degenerative diseases that are the principal causes of physical incapacity and death.

We have done great things for the first few years of the life span. We have done relatively little toward freeing the middle and later years from degenerative impairment.

It is somewhat of an anti-climax. It is a game in which we pile up encouraging points in the first period, only to lose them before the onslaught of our adversary in the last period. To revert to the book-keeping metaphor, I am afraid that the balance, as the biological auditor sees it at least, is a debit balance. Let our civilization keep the red-ink entries running at their present rate and it will run into physical bankruptcy. I don't need to tell an audience of insurance men that this is not alarmism or mere phrase-making. It is cold fact, and it gets colder every year.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Our educational institutions, from the kindergarten to the university, are teaching nearly every branch of knowledge under the sun. There are cultural values and helpful mental disciplines in all these subjects. But we have largely ignored Nature in designing our curricula. The first obligation of any educational system is to fit every child and every adult for the business of living, and living is basally a very physical business.

The body is a chemico-physical machine. It, like any other machine, must be run intelligently and carefully. It is not self-governing in the higher animals. We must know its structures, its functions, its powers, and its limitations. We must know how to run that machine successfully under the very unnatural conditions that our civilization has brought about. The successful running of the physical machine requires a long and careful training in hygiene, and the congested close-contact conditions of modern life have brought about a degree of physical interdependence in society that requires of every individual some general knowledge of the nature and importance of public health.

Are we teaching this? We are not.

Our schools and colleges do not prepare our pupils and students to meet successfully the physical experiences and responsibilities of life. The present position of physical education in the curriculum is inadequate at best, and negligible or absent in many cases. Nature cares nothing for our curricular theories, but it is her laws and the knowledge thereof that govern the safety of human life. Education must reckon with *her* laws and include *her* teachings, or the physical vessel laden with the precious cargo of mind and spirit, will crash on the rocks that ignorance has left unmarked in the path of navigation.

The quantity and quality of hygiene taught in the lower schools is not "delivering the goods." It is of some value, but that "some" represents only a small fraction of what it must become if it is to be biologically effective.

In higher education, physical education holds the lowest position. It is possible for thousands of students to go through our institutions of higher education, technical and professional schools included, and graduate with

little or no knowledge of the complex and imperative interests of their physical lives. Our colleges, from a curricular standpoint at least, seem to be clinging to the medieval idea that you can build a wall between intellectual and spiritual advancement on the one side and the physical problems of life on the other, and that you can train people in the one and ignore the other. That wall is an anachronism; it is unbiological; it is against the principles of those major prophets of education—Plato, Locke, Mulcaster, Pestalozzi, and Rousseau, all of whom placed health teaching at the very foundation of education. Haven't we sense enough to tear that wall down? Apparently not; the wall still stands. And its effect on the student? Well . . . consider the case of that young Bachelor of Arts, Humpty Dumpty:

"Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall,—
He was B.A. in spring, and T.B. in the fall.
And all the curricular theories,
And all the one-sided educational men,
Couldn't get Humpty out of the sanatorium again."

Another important aspect of hygiene teaching is that it provides an indispensable pre-requisite for the development of the eugenic attitude. It has been well said that "a people who are not interested in hygienics will never become interested in eugenics."

While it is not lawful to divide truth, and while comparisons of value are even more odious in science than elsewhere, I feel convinced, nevertheless that the biologists who are making the most important contributions to human welfare are those who work in the field of genetics and eugenics. They have laid before us facts which every would-be improver of human life must reckon with. Their findings have destroyed many of our illusions as to the improvability of certain types of humans; they have rudely disturbed our faith in educational panaceas, social cure-alls, and Utopian recipes. We may ignore them today, but we will have to listen to them tomorrow, for they have produced truths which must revolutionize all our humanitarian schemes in the future.

What is the relation of the eugenic attitude to the idea of human equality? I shall attempt to answer that by asking some questions under my fourth heading, namely

HEALTH AND THE IDEALS OF DEMOCRACY

A democracy is popularly supposed to be a state in which everyone enjoys political and legal equality. All members thereof have an equal voice in government, and enjoy equal justice, free from any class distinction.

It is calculated to abolish every form of injustice and to guarantee a birthright of "equal opportunity for all."

Having achieved this beautiful state, its citizens gather at stated intervals to celebrate, very noisily and with great volumes of florid oratory, the idea that "all men are born free and equal."

That idea is the most pitiful piece of "wishful thinking" that man has ever done. It is something worse than that: it is a sweet and soothing drug, a habit-forming drug, that narcotises society into thinking that it has abolished

injustice and inequality and slavery and the binding of flesh with chains.

Occasionally, when the drug has worn off a bit, they are vaguely conscious that their beautiful scheme isn't quite perfect, so they get up a tag-day for the home for crippled children, or the school for the blind, or ask the government to build a new wing on the overcrowded insane asylum.

Then having chucked democracy a few conscience-soothing coins, they are off to the movies to hear all about "the land of the free," or perchance to a dinner where they may listen to a lot of post-prandial eloquence assuring them that "fair play is the genius of the British peoples" and that "Britons never shall be slaves," etc., etc. And so home, well entertained, well fed, and—well narcotised again.

* * * * *

Over in the court yonder, a judge is saying to a prisoner: "You must not do physical hurt to a fellow man. Society must be protected from men who do that, so I sentence you to the penitentiary."

But over in certain other institutions babies and little children lie with deformed and diseased bodies, and sightless eyes, and blurred groping minds—born free and equal, eh? Who failed to guard their safety? Was anybody sent to the penitentiary because of those little bodies lying there in pain? Who answers for the crime committed against them, that robbed them of their health and liberty? Where do they fit into this beautiful theory of democracy? Are they, by any chance, the children of these injustice-hating freedom-loving Britons or Canadians or Americans?. . . .They stare dully from the hospital windows at the crowd in the streets . . . . there are other children out there, healthy children, getting joy out of life. . . .Why the difference? Who did what, or, *who left what undone?* Why this cruel predestination to a life of twisted bodies, dull minds, unequal opportunity?

"None answered this; but after silence spake
Some vessel of a more ungainly make
They sneer at me for leaning all awry,
What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"

And another voice, centuries before Omar, crying pitifully in Israel: "Her children have gone into captivity . . . . is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow. . . ."

* * * * *

Oh, we have signed our declarations of independence and our emancipation proclamations and we have set up the freedom of ballot and bench. It's all right, as far as it goes.

But there is a great multitude today that can never know freedom, equality, or the joy of living. They can know life only as a thing of pain or dreary disability. Are they too under the aegis of democracy?

* * * * *

You are wondering why I am so concerned about sick children. I served formerly as resident pathologist in a large hospital in the United States which dealt exclusively with sick infants and children, and particularly with chronic or long-term crippled cases. Most of the children suffered from diseases that were largely or entirely preventable.

These wee patients were the children of the very lowest type of slum-dwellers. Biologically they were human trash, born of human trash, and we were busy saving them—so that they, in turn, might reproduce more human trash and endlessly perpetuate and increase the problem of the afflicted and the unfit, their lives a burden to themselves and to society. And this we did as an act of service to humanity!

Those little sufferers changed my philosophy of life, in all that pertains to fairness, democracy, and the merely palliative forms of medical and social service. They challenged the present status of Christianity itself. They caused us, and still cause us, to ask "Why did this happen? Must it go on forever? How can it be stopped?"

For until it *is* stopped, our civilization stands indicted of a crime.

* * * * *

It was on a Fourth of July. In the streets outside, millions of people were celebrating the strange idea that "all men are born free and equal."

A common prostitute came up the long courtyard, carrying a bundle in her arms. She laid it on the examining table and slunk away. We undressed the baby for the usual examination. As a pathologist I had seen most of the common lesions of disease, and was hardened to it professionally.

But what I saw on that child's body caused me to lie awake all night, wishing I could forget what I had seen.

I was to see many others like it later, but it remains the symbol of what I am pleading for today.

Outside in the streets . . . . "free and equal."

* * * * *

What of the freedom and equality of that baby?

"Free"? From what?

"Equal"? To whom?

Equal to the thousands of others like him.

* * * * *

Who shall answer the judgment of God for the freedom and equality of that baby? The diseased man and the diseased woman that brought him into the world?

No—the "civilization" that shrugs its shoulders and permits this thing to go on happening!

The blackest blot on our civilization is the tragedy of a little child suffering from a preventable disease. Until we have removed that blot with all the cruelty and injustice which it lays upon the children of earth, we are not worthy to call ourselves a true democracy. Let us strike the word democracy from our lips until we have *earned* it by giving a fair deal physically and spiritually to every child in our land.

ATTITUDE AS THE DECIDING FACTOR

We are often told that with the increase of scientific knowledge disease will vanish in the future evolution of mankind.

Such statements are the product of an unscientific and unwarranted optimism. Disease will always be with us. We have reduced its ravages

and we will reduce them still further. Preventive medicine, public health, therapeutics—all have greater victories awaiting them. But even after they have won these victories there will still be a great residue of disease due to folly, carelessness, bad physical management, and dysgenic impairment. The most brilliant research, the wisest legislation, will never be able to overcome the results of faulty attitudes.

Granted that we can some day devise a perfect system of hygiene for the individual and the community, the problem will still face us:—how are you going to make people *care* about it, accept it, practise it? How are you going to bring about a higher ideal of the sacredness of human life? How are you going to get the lower and dysgenic classes of humans to stop breeding more dysgenic generations? How are you going to alter thistle-genes into fig-genes? By research, forsooth? The most enthusiastic scientist would not dare to say that.

As a worker in the field of science I am proud of the contributions of science toward increasing the safety and comfort of mankind. But it is also because I am a scientist that I realize and must point out the eternal limitation of science: science can only tell us what we can do—what we ought to do—but it can't make us do it.

The central problem of human improvement is not the increase of knowledge. The old copy-book phrase told us that "Knowledge is power." Knowledge is *not* power. Knowledge is a tool, not a force. It is produced by an ideal; it must be activated and applied by an ideal.

"Back of the tool is the workman's arm
And back of the arm is a force,
And back of the force is the spirit of man
That guideth the tool in its course.
And it isn't his pride in the tool or the art,
But the prayer on his lips and the hope in his heart
That the work which he does may be worthy to lay
On the altar of God at the end of the day."

What then is our central problem? To conquer ignorance? No. To conquer folly and selfishness and injustice as well as ignorance; to add to the cold white light of research the warm glowing light of greater sympathy and tenderness and compassion; to distribute throughout all the levels of society that sense of a common responsibility and interdependence which we call brotherhood; to give democracy a new definition and a new vision, wherein every child shall have physical as well as political and legal freedom; where every child shall have a fair opportunity to begin life without the handicap of disease or feeble-mindedness or a degrading environment, for there is no room under the justice of God or man for the cruelty of such a predestination. We have banished the injustice of predestination from our theology; let us banish it from the lives of our children.

* * * * *

The two greatest potentialities for good in the world today are Christianity and science. The first is the principal force; the second is the principal tool. Neither can render its fullest service to humanity without the other; the motive

and the method must be complementary and inseparable. If either fails us, our civilization perishes. Don't think that that couldn't happen. It has happened, many times in human history.

But it is hard, at present, to reconcile Christian practice with scientific fact. The Christian doctrine says: "Protect the weak; enable the unfit to survive." The scientist says that that is unbiological. He says that that increases our physical liabilities, our social and governmental problems, and he is right.

What is the answer, then? This: that *we must express the Christian motive through the scientific method.* It is not in keeping with the genius of Christianity that we should permit any life to enter the world, damned before it was born. "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Nor is it in keeping with the genius of science that we should continue to bungle when we have laboriously worked out a better way.

Our attitude toward the congenitally handicapped, the hereditarily defective, the feeble-minded, is neither Christian or scientific.

We are not un-Christian in the ordinary sense of the word; we are simply applying a lower level of Christian helpfulness where we might apply a higher one. If instead of our belated ministrations we were to direct our best efforts toward prophlylaxis, we would bring our Christianity to a higher achievement of mercy and justice.

I agree very heartily with that wise physician, Dr. David Stewart, who said: "It is a very fine thing to play the Good Samaritan, but it would be a far better thing if we got out and policed the road from Jerusalem to Jericho."

Gentlemen, the highest form of compassion is prevention! The highest form of Christian service is that which gets there before, not after. The highest application of human biology is eugenics. It is simply the doctrine of fair play applied to birth. It is democracy expressed in terms of biological law. It is, as Wiggam writes in his New Decalogue of Science, "the Golden Rule projected down the hereditary stream of protoplasm—"Do unto both the born and the unborn as you would have both the born and the unborn do unto you."

I believe that the day of these things will come. It is still very far away. But so long as we believe that there is purpose and meaning and hope for the future in human life, so long must we labour to bring in that day.

Is human life, with all its strange mixture of beauty and sordidness, triumph and tragedy, joyousness and pathos, its striving and falling and—getting up again—can such a thing be meaningless and futile?

Is it only what Balfour called it, "a discreditable episode in the history of one of the meaner planets"? Is it only what Santayana called it, "a rocket flaring in the night" . . . . "a fleeting moment of warmth and colour and music between two eternities of silence"? That is unthinkable. Certainly it was never the attitude of those whose names are written in the great book of those who served their fellow men.

* * * * *

The faultiest of all attitudes is held, strangely enough, by a great multitude of very good people, and is the product of a religious misconception, namely, that disease is "the will of God" and that we must accept it and bow to it. The scientist calls that idea "religio-fatalism." It is a survival of primitive religions and demonologies, and it has no place in any religion which holds that God is good and merciful and just.

Think you the physical tragedies of life are but the scourgings of Omnipotence to wring from our lips "Thy will be done"?

Then read your Kipling again, in the final verse of his poem "Natural Theology":

"This was none of the good Lord's pleasure
For the Spirit He breathed in Man is free;
But what comes after is measure for measure,
And not a God that afflicteth thee.
As was the sowing so the reaping
Is now and evermore shall be.
Thou art delivered to thy own keeping,
Only Thyself hath afflicted thee!"

Need we continue, then, to travel, like Flagellantes, the dreary pathway of self-affliction when the light of Christianity and the tremendous powers of science enable us to travel a roadway of greater happiness and freedom?

Even that roadway must be travelled "per aspera ad astra," but there will be no adversities that knowledge and courage and love may not overcome. For these are the powers and mercies of God, in Whose sign we conquer. These are His will.

Then as we go back to our work today, you to your field of service and I to mine, let us go back with no faltering, no fatalism, no sense of futility, but fighting as men fight who see afar off the light of victory. Let there be in our hearts this day and in all the days to come, that which was in John Oxenham's heart when he wrote these words:

"Thy will be done?
Tis not Thy Will
That man should kiss a chastening rod,
But, heart abrim, and head to heaven,
Should praise God for these mercies given.

Press on in hope!
Work on in faith!
Love conquers all things,—
Even Death!"

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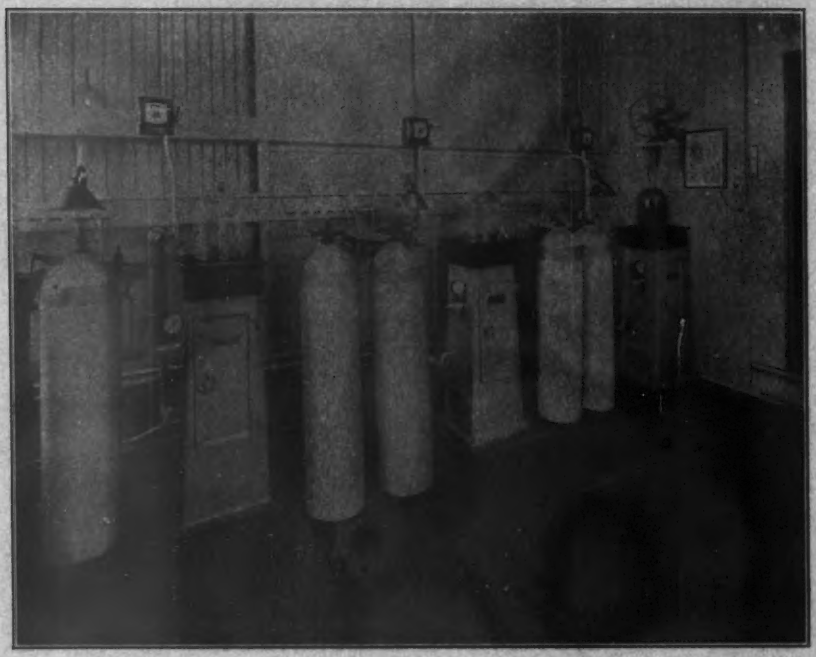

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